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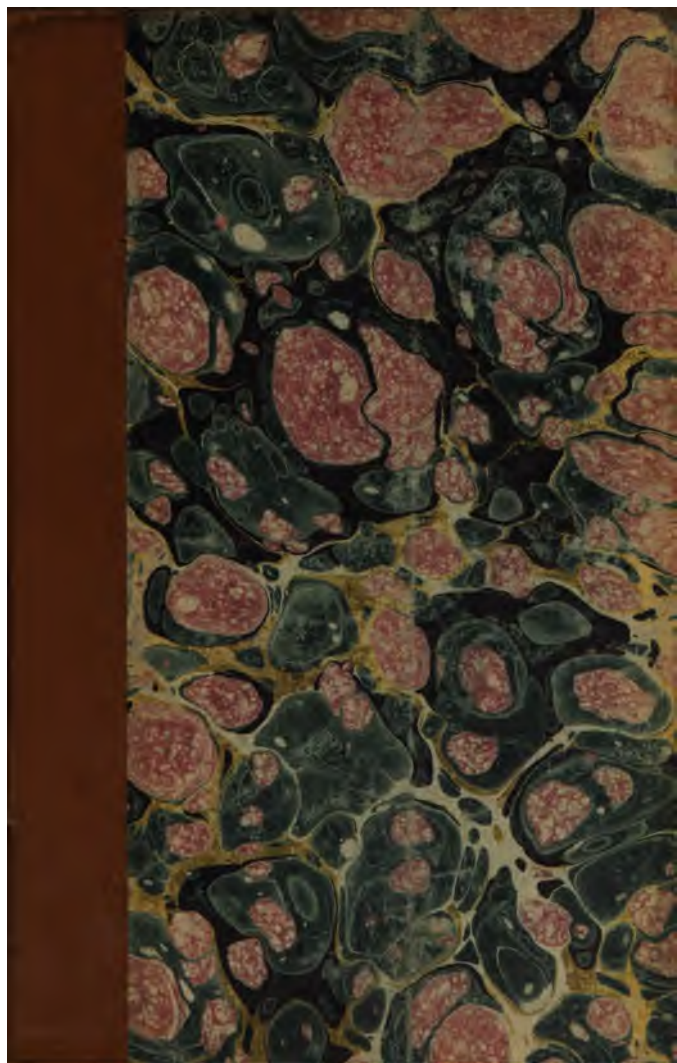
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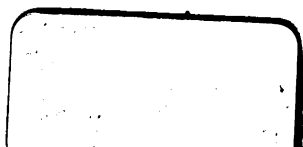
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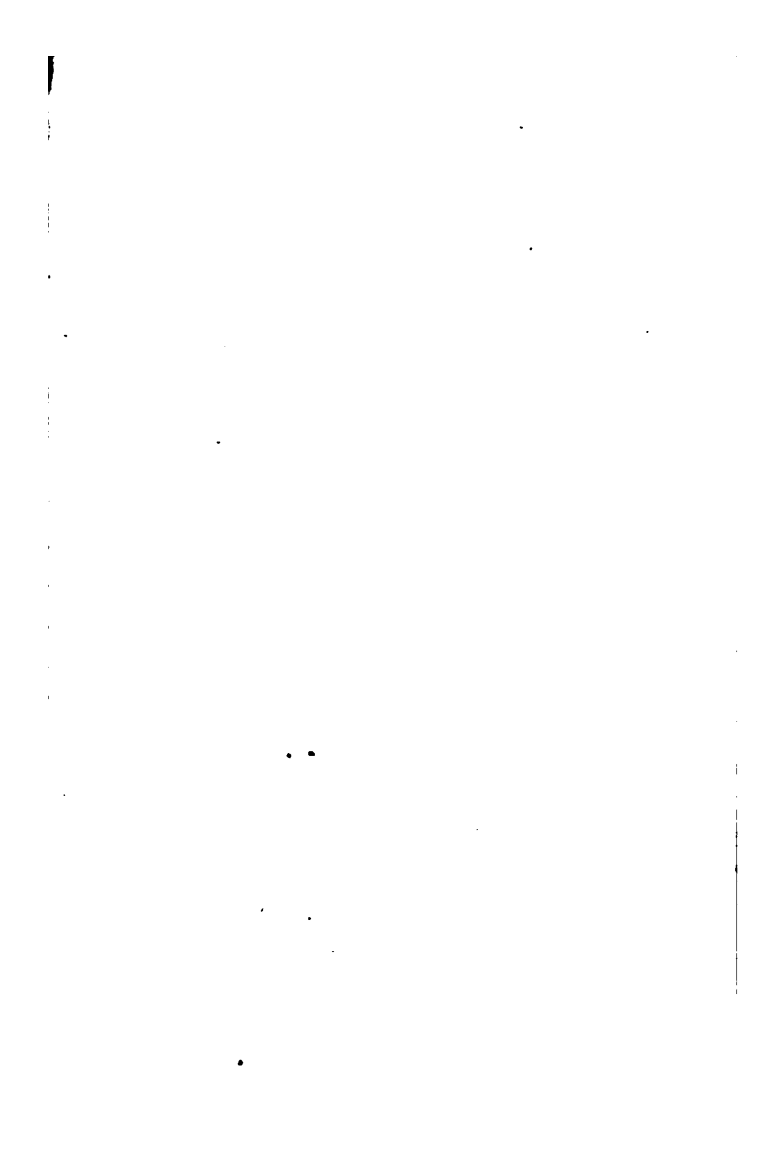
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SHORT MEDITATIONS

ON

ELISHA.

2 KINGS II.—XIII.

“TELL ME, I PRAY THEE,
ALL THE GREAT THINGS THAT ELISHA HATH DONE.”

VIII. 4.



LONDON:

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SUBJECTS

IN

THE HISTORY OF ELISHA.

2 KINGS II.—XIII.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE ministries of Elijah and Elisha occupied the days of the family of Ahab, of the house of Omri; the time of deepest corruption in the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. The testimony of the Lord about those times is this; "And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him."

It was in those days that Hiel the Bethelite dared the arm of the Lord by rebuilding Jericho; an act which affronting the truth and power of the Lord, looked with infidel boldness, and said, "Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. ii. 17). For Ahab's days were days of man's proud provocation and temptation again.

At such a time, just on the act of Hiel, Elijah is called out. (1 Kings xvi. 34; xvii. 1). And in him we see an entirely independent call of God and energy of the Spirit. He is quite in the Lord's own hand. He does not belong to the Priesthood. He never seeks the Temple. He never consults established oracles, or walks orderly according to the statutes or ordinances of Israel. But the Lord takes him up, and fills him with light and power altogether His own, not reaching him by any prescribed channel at all.

And so Elisha. He was independent of all that was already instituted in the land. The hand of the Lord uses him, the Spirit of God fills him, without respect to the Temple or the Priesthood.

And we get the common, and yet most blessed instruction of Scripture, out of this—that when r

had corrupted and righteously lost every thing, (as in Ahab, and in his times), the Lord finds occasion by that to bring forth His own resources. Man's wilderness was Christ's storehouse. (Matt. xiv. 15, 21).

But though there is this common character and moral in the call of these two prophets, (and indeed, in measure, of all the prophets), yet their ministries are, in detail, very distinct. *Testimony against evil, and consequent suffering, mark the history of Elijah; power, and grace in using it for others, mark that of Elisha.* Both are seen in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose shadows, of course, they were. In one aspect of His history on earth, we see the suffering, driven, persecuted witness; the world hating Him, because He testified that its works were evil; in another we see the powerful, gracious, ready, friend of others; all that had sorrows or necessities getting healing and blessing from Him.

More, too, than even this stands reflected in the histories of these prophets; for Elijah's sorrow here, and rejection by the world, ends in heaven; Elisha's power carries him a-head of all that might resist, and keeps him in constant honour and triumph on the earth. And these things foreshadow the heavenly and earthly things of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and King of Israel.

I would now pass through the history of Elisha given to us in 2 Kings ii.—xiii. I do so, however, only rapidly, though in this little journey noticing each detached scene in order, and seeking to draw forth something of the divine counsel, and the divine moral, having found it a scripture of great interest to my own soul.

SHORT MEDITATIONS.

2 KINGS II.—XIII.

II. 1—14.

These verses give us the first distinct portion.

Long before this, Elijah had invited Elisha into ministry with him (1 Kings xix.) by passing by and casting his mantle upon him: but Elisha was not then quite prepared. He pleaded his father, and his mother, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father, and my mother, and then I will follow thee." Upon which Elijah, as it were, withdrew his mantle from him, recalled his invitation, saying, "Go back again, for what have I done to thee."

This was significant. For though Elisha is for a moment seen ministering to Elijah after this (1 Kings xix. 21), yet we do not again find him expressly in company with his master, till now that his master is just about to be taken from him.

And to what end is he now seen with him? just to abide the fire, just to stand the test, whether indeed he were, or were not, fully prepared for the mantle.

Elijah can leave his mantle behind him. He needed it not in the heaven to which he was going. As soon as he entered the fiery chariot on which the whirlwind attended—as soon as he was borne by angels (Heb. i. 7),

up to heaven, he may, and must, disrobe himself. The mantle was the instrument of power, the gift for service *here*—and the servant lays that aside when his service is over; just as the sinner at his conversion, when his old estate is past, can cast away his garments. (Mark x. 15). “We know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

But though Elijah may now dispense with his mantle, is Elisha prepared for it? That is the question. And this trial is made by two instruments, Elijah himself, and the sons of the prophets. But both were used by God to prove if indeed Elijah’s mantle were chief in Elisha’s esteem, whether he carried within him the spirit of a true Levite, of one with whom the Urim and Thummim might be, being found able now to say to his father and his mother, “I have not seen him.” (Deut. xxxiii. 8. 9.) This was the test; the Lord was weighing Elisha’s value for glory; He was ascertaining how heavy a share with the joy and honour of being one in the spirit and ministry of Elijah, was in the scales of Elisha’s affections. And he stands the test; nothing slackens his hand. He silences all temptations; he declares plainly that he coveted the mantle, the double portion of the Spirit. He turns his eye from every object but the glory. It is no more his father or his mother behind him whom he would return to kiss, but it is his father in the faith, his kindred in the Spirit, he clings to, and towards whom and whom alone he looks upward and onward. “My father, my father,” says he, as Elijah was ascending, “the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.”

This was enough. There was a slight flaw in his title to the mantle at first (1 Kings xix.), as we saw, but now his title is perfect. He is a true Levite. "He knows no man after the flesh," and the mantle is his.

And this is a holy lesson for us. For how little do our hearts, surely we know, value the mantle, value the honour of serving Jesus, or a share of His coming glories. This tested not the prophet's title to God Himself, or salvation. Elijah had no doubt that Elisha was the Lord's: but this was trying his estimation of glory. And that is properly our only question. We are to examine ourselves whether we be walking worthy of the Lord's glory—whether we value a share in it. And well for us, if discipline lead us to covet it, as it did Elisha: well, if nature, which is so tenacious of its life in us, be rebuked, and while it says, go back and kiss father and mother, we rather listen to the voice of the mantle which tells us to go forward after the prophet of God.

And humbling it is to know that the heart, left to itself without the Spirit, cares not for God or His glory. It once sold Him for a mess of pottage, then for a herd of swine, and then for thirty pieces of silver. And would still for any thing. The chariot may go back to heaven empty for aught we care. This is the language of the heart. But O for grace to value a portion with *Thee*, blessed Saviour! O for power in our souls to long for a seat with *Thee* in that heavenly chariot that shall separate us from earth, and its interests, and take us in *Thee*, and with *Thee*, and through *Thee*, to the height of glorious bliss!

II. 15—22.

There are different elevations even among the Saints. Lot did not stand on a level with Abraham, nor did the 7000 hidden ones with Elijah. But all were, equally, the elect of God, known to Him, as reserved by Him. So here; Elisha and the sons of the prophets illustrate the same thing. We have just seen the one pressing through all hindrances after heavenly glory, but now we are to see the other with a mind too sadly formed by the earth.

These sons of the prophets were, Nicodemus like, slow hearted to believe. Their thoughts do not rise above the mountains and valleys of the earth. They had never seen a heavenly chariot. They cannot think but that Elijah is still somewhere *here*—and they search for him here. Elisha would have led them at once to his place of light and elevation: but they must be taught through their own mistakes.

Elisha can, however, own them, weak and inapprehensive as they may be, and in the power of the Spirit far below the prophet of God; but still they share his company, and his blessing. The city where they dwelt had been under a curse. (Josh. vi.) But he brings healing to it. "There shall be no more curse," was the language of the prophet over Jericho, as it will be the language of the Lord over the inheritance. (Rom. viii. Rev. xxii.)* And this is comforting while it is humb-

* If it be not too bold a thought, I would suggest, from the history we get of it in scripture, that Jericho may be looked at as a sample of the whole earth. The curse was at the beginning pronounced upon that city. (Josh. vi.); that curse was executed on it, (1 Kings xvi.); but at the end it becomes a healed place, suited to the habitation and joy of God and man again. Is not this the parable of the earth?

ling to us consciously weak ones—to us who, from what we know of our poor souls, stand more with the sons of the prophets round Jericho, than travel in the strength of the Holy Ghost, with Elisha, through the Jordan. It should humble us to think that we are not on his level, while it may blessedly comfort us to know that the Lord is still ours. The small and the great stand before Him.

But here I would observe, that from the moment when our prophet took up the mantle of his master, God was all he had; but he found Him enough for all he needed. His need, however, like that of Jesus, was not his own. It was for others he occupied his resource and strength in God. He was rich, but not for himself. Thus—he meets the inconveniences of nature—without a purse he relieves the poor—without a commissariat he feeds armies—the deadly thing he makes harmless—without bread he gives food to a multitude, and gathers fragments—without medicine he heals disease—without arms or soldiers he defeats enemies—in famine he supplies a nation—though dead he communicates life.

All this tells us of Jesus. For Jesus had nothing, yet made He many rich. He had the worlds of nature and of grace, for the needy children of men. And His ways shine in the reflections of His servant Elisha.

II. 23—25.

Another meditation is suggested here. Children of Bethel are another order of persons altogether. If Elisha present the strong one in Christ, the true Levite, who had turned his back on all but the

glory, and the chariot of fire to conduct him to it, and if the sons of the prophets are the weak ones, still, however, by divine grace, in the same company and blessing as Elisha, these children of Bethel, on the other hand, are the mockers, or infidels. They despise the word of the Lord. They mock the thought of ascension. "Where is the promise of His coming?" say they. (2 Pet. iii.). The whole mystery of God made known for salvation and glory, is their sport. They put the Son of God to open shame. "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head;" they say to Elisha, as reproaching the thought that Elijah had already gone up. And here the curse falls. Ministers of wrath come forth, the bears on the children of Bethel, and the eagles on the carcase, to vindicate the divine truth against the gainsayers. Creation is not to groan for ever under the curse which our sin has put on it, but shall be delivered from bondage into glorious liberty (Rom. viii.), as Jericho had just been here; but the curse will rest on the Cain, the children of Bethel, who despise God's remedy for the mischief. And it is written of such mocking, infidel children, children of disobedience, whether of Babylon or of Edom, "happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." (Psa. cxxxvii.).

III.

We do not find Elisha the sport of wicked kings as Elijah had been. No rude hand of theirs prevails against him, but their fate, the rather, hangs on his word, and the power of God that was with him.

Without him, we here see three kings brought to the brink of destruction with all their armies. But the word of the Lord, by him, changes the scene, and distress of nations, with perplexity, is turned into victory and spoils.

But in the progress of this, we have something to notice.

The king of Judah is here found in bad company. This confederacy with the apostate house of Ahab was a symptom of sad unguardedness in Jehoshaphat. But in the divine grace, occasions are allowed to manifest the hidden life that was in him. Trouble surprises him, and then the voice of his better nature is heard. "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" This shews the uneasiness of the renewed mind of Jehoshaphat in such a scene as the present, though in an unwatched moment he had consented to it. And it was in the Lord's goodness to send the trouble, that the life which was indeed in him might appear. (See 1 Kings xxii. 7).

This is comforting to us. But there is something further in this narrative.

Elisha finds, when in the presence of these kings, that he cannot readily prophesy. Jehoshaphat may claim the word of the Lord from him, it is true, for Jehoshaphat is the Lord's servant: but Jehoshaphat is not where he should be, and the spirit in Elisha is checked.

This is solemn. A minstrel must be brought ere the Spirit in the prophet can have his full and graceful flow.

What a rebuke to the king of Judah was this! what

a rebuke to any saint, that another finds the Spirit in him restrained in his presence! Is not this often so? Does not our fleshliness interrupt the fine, free, and easy current of the Spirit, and has not the minstrel still to be thus called for? Some delay, some effort, something incidental, is to be exercised or suffered, by those that are spiritual, before all can be in tune again.

So was it here, and so oftentimes is it yet. This was the symptom of Jehoshaphat's bad condition, but of Elisha's heavenly-mindedness. Had Elisha been less in communion, he would not have stood in such need of the minstrel. Had he been in the flesh, and not in the Spirit, he would not have felt the breach, that Jehoshaphat, now in the flesh, was occasioning. His heavenliness of mind may be known by this sensitiveness, and the need that he had of restoration. Jesus had continually to call for the minstrel. His communion met its constant hindrance here, even from His own, who understood neither His joys nor His sorrows. He had to leave them; He had to rise before day, to continue all night, to go into a solitary place for prayer to God. It was the perfectness of His communion that made this necessary. He needed the minstrel. Had He been on ground nearer the earth, He would not have been so quick in feeling the earthliness of all around Him: but He knew it all by the deepest contrast with His own soul; and the charm and melody of His own converse with the Father restored Him.

Such was the blessed Master, the pattern of all perfections, and such, in his measure, was Elisha. A mere instrument of divine power, or of a spiritual gift, may perform its part or exercise itself any where with equal

freedom. Balaam is not hindered by the presence of Balak and the altars, from uttering his prophecies. For he is merely the instrument—a carnal material, as it were, through which another breathes. But where a renewed mind is the instrument, this cannot be. It will be alive in its own proper affections and in its sensitive holiness, all the while it is used as an instrument of power.

And such was Elisha. He cannot but be grieved at the scene now before him. Jehoshaphat ought not to have been there; and Elisha must let him know that he must enter it in another way altogether. A saint is called to serve or testify in places of deepest defilement. But he can never be there with the sympathies or consent of his soul.

It was Elisha's praise, as a saint, to be thus like his Lord. To be quick in feeling the weight and pressure of such a scene as this, where another saint was walking in the flesh, and not in the Spirit. And how should we covet this, beloved! How should we so live and move, and have our being in the sanctuary, that the unclean could not touch it unperceived!

IV. 1—7.

“According to your faith, be it unto you!” was the Lord's word to the two blind men. Wondrous and blessed indeed, that thus in any wise our faith, or patience, or expectation of hope, should be allowed to measure the active and bounteous power of our Lord! but so was it. “According to your faith, be it unto

you;" and again, "as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." (Mat. viii. ix.).

And this is the voice of the miracle wrought here through the hand of Elisha. For as long as the poor widow produced her vessels, the pot produced its oil. The oil waited on the vessels. The vessels were the measure of the oil. In other words, divine power waited on faith—faith measured the active resources of God on the occasion. This was like the Lord, of old, standing with Abraham. For as long as Abraham stood interceding, the Lord stood promising. (Gen. xviii. 17—33.).

This blessed grace of God has its illustration here. But there is another thing. "What hast thou in the house?" said the prophet to the woman. As Jesus afterwards said to His disciples, "How many loaves have ye?"—or, as He had said to Moses at the hill, "What is that in thine hand?" For it is suitable that whatever we have should be put to use. It may be quite unequal to the necessity, but whatever it be, it should be occupied. It may be but a shepherd's staff, and Israel has to be redeemed;—it may be but a pot of oil, and the creditor who had a right to sell children and all, has to be paid;—it may be but five barley loaves, and five thousand hungry ones have to be fed. But still, let what there is be occupied and brought forth. "She hath done what she could." And accordingly, the word here is, "What hast thou in the house?" And then on bringing forth the pot of oil, the all of the house, let faith count on the power of God, and His word of promise, and not only shall the creditor be discharged, but life sustained for many days,

over and above the payment; not only shall the multitude be fed, but fragments gathered; not only shall Israel be redeemed out of Egypt; but the same shepherd's rod, now God's rod, shall feed and keep the flock to the end of the desert.

IV. 8—37.

Here we have another exhibition of the power of our prophet's walk through the earth. This is very glorious; savouring, as we shall see, very strikingly of the energy and authority of God that was with him. And yet, though walking thus in such power towards others, he has himself, all the while, nothing. Poor indeed, while making many rich: seeming to possess all things, yet really having nothing. Receiving bounty and care in the ordinary need of life, from those in whose behalf he, at the same time, is opening resources which were altogether beyond man. And beside—he walks *alone* in the world, and yet *all* wait on him.

All this gives us a strong expression of the ways of One who could call Himself Master and Lord, receiving the homage of faith, even while He had not where to lay His head. In all this our prophet is marking out for us, as in a reflection, the path of Jesus.

The woman whom this passage introduces to us was evidently one of the godly seed in the land. She lived in the distant tribe of Issachar, and does not appear to have personally known this mighty prophet of God. But she quickly apprehends something of the Lord about him. She had been already taught of God; her

religion was that which discerned God's mind and way in an evil day, when apostacy was clouding every thing. New moons and sabbaths, as her husband wrongly judged, did not constitute her service, or mark out the path of her spirit with God. But Elisha, who was at that day the channel of divine grace and power apart from the temple and its ordinances, was her object and hope, as he was God's object and instrument.

She accordingly prepares him a place of sojourning in her own house. And her intelligence of him is further and strikingly marked by the preparation she makes for him. It was but a little chamber, with its bed, its table, its stool, and its candlestick. All was in the simplicity of a man of God, who stood apart from the world, a stranger in the midst of its corruptions.

She knew him because she was like him. One spirit was in them both. She understood his pilgrim thoughts and habits, just because she was exercised in them herself. And this is the only way really and divinely to know either the children of God, or God Himself. It is by the union and mind of the same spirit.

She dwelt among her own people, and cared not to be spoken for either to the King or to the Captain of the host. Even as Elisha; who, though he had the ear of the King and of the Captain of the host, (as well he might after feeding their armies in the day of battle), yet would be a stranger and pilgrim in the land, and lodge in a little chamber with a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick.

These are the sympathies in the Spirit between the children of God. She could receive a prophet in the name of a prophet, according to the tastes of a pro-

phet. And the great prophet of that day, God's witness in the land, the vessel of fullest divine treasure that was then, in the name of the Lord, shedding its blessing wherever it was borne in the might of the Spirit, is of one mind with this unknown and distant daughter of Abraham in the borders of Issachar. Precious the traces of one Spirit thus quickening and forming every elect member of the same household!

And we shall find, not only Abraham's daughter, but something of Abraham's house and Abraham's faith, in this honoured and interesting place. This woman had no child, and her husband was now old. But as the Lord Himself had once said to Abraham, "according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son;" so now, the Lord's prophet says to this Shunamite, "according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." And so it was—as with Sarah so with this woman. The quickening power of God entered her house, and as it was promised her, she embraced a son.

More, however, than even this is to be witnessed in this house; she is to learn, through the hand of Elisha, *resurrection*, as well as *quickenings*, *power*; just as in the house of Abraham, it was learnt from the Lord Himself. Isaac, who was at the first quickened in the womb of Sarah through the power of God, was afterwards received as from the dead. And so here. The sentence of death is laid in this child of promise, but the same power of God, through Elisha, raises him from the dead.

This is Abraham's house again, and a distant woman of Issachar is thus noticed, thus honoured, and graced.

by the Lord God of her people. This makes this house of the Shunamite, a sample of that glorious mystery in which we are all concerned, a witness of every soul where the power of God is known; for it is there a quickening, and resurrection power, which calls up those who were dead in trespasses and sins, to live in the life of the Son of God.

Faith possesses itself of this. Faith, which apprehends death in ourselves, but life in Jesus. The simpler, the happier. The more unquestioning, the more according to God's mind. It was so in this Shunamite. Her faith, as we saw, was ready at the first to apprehend the prophet, it was ready to know that all was well, or should be well, even when death had entered the house. And it was ready, in spite of all tempters, to cleave to God's prophet, God's object and instrument, and to him only. This was precious simplicity of confidence. And throughout the trial of her faith, to which she is now put, as was her father Abraham in his day, I observe the same calmness and certainty of soul. When the Patriarch was ordered to take his son, and offer him up for a burnt offering, he went forth to the trial, without the least disturbance of soul. The ass and the young men were at once put into readiness, and the knife, and the fire, and the wood, were all prepared. Faith counted on resurrection. Abraham reckoned on God being able to raise Isaac from the dead, as of old, he had quickened him in the womb of Sarah; and Abraham was *undisturbed*. And so, when the deliverance did come, and the voice from heaven announced the substitute for Isaac, Abraham is not *amazed*. He does not wonder or suspect, or ask again,

whether indeed this be so, but he looses his son in the same repose and certainty that he had bound him. O what depth and character there is in that calmness! Faith had anticipated resurrection. And altogether in the same spirit is the path of faith trodden here, by this dear and honored daughter of Abraham. Death was in her house again, but she knew of a quickener of the dead. And therefore the ass and the young men are again got ready, and "it is well," is the language of her faith in sure and certain hope of resurrection of the dead. And at the end, *life* is no *amazement* to her. She received her dead brought to life again. (Heb. xi.) She can loose her son by faith, as well as bind him. She falls at the prophet's feet, and bows her head. She owns in thankfulness and humiliation, the precious gift, but she bears it away without amazement. It was no wonder to her. She does not curiously examine the child, whether indeed it were alive again. Faith had counted on such an hour, and already had received her child as in resurrection, and her soul had only to know that her beloved one was warm and lively in her bosom again.

Indeed all this is the pattern of a sinner's faith. Should it be thought a thing incredible with us that God should raise the dead? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" faith is to say. With God all things are possible. And we are to go forth from a state of death in trespasses and sins into life and liberty—from the spirit of bondage and of fear, and from under the guilt of an unpurged conscience, without amazement or suspicion, because the Lord has done it. "Once was I blind but now I see," may be the calm, happy-

thankful certainty of the sinner, who has met the Son of God in the healing virtue of His blood.

But there is still more in the faith of this dear soul. I find her faith tried in the two ways that the faith of Elisha had before been tried. The sons of the prophets on the one hand, the word of Elijah on the other, had put the faith of Elisha to sore trial: but it prevailed, and onward he followed his master till the chariot of Israel separated them. And so here.

The thoughts of her husband first, and then the way of Elisha, both rise as tempters of the stedfastness of her soul. "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day," says her husband to her, "it is neither new moon nor sabbath;" and Elisha is for Gehazi satisfying her, and would have him go forward and lay his staff on the face of the child. But the woman's faith silences both. And she presses through the hindrance in the same decision and fervency that Elisha himself before had done, saying, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." (ii. 2; iv. 30.)

The great enemy and deceiver, that old serpent, often proposes some delegated virtue—some servant and his staff. But faith ever withstands. Through his subtilty and darkening of divine counsels, confidence in ordinances was prevailing in Galatia, but Paul clung to the cross, and cast the bondwoman out of the house. For the trial of the soul, even the Lord Himself, like His prophet here, can make some such offer. "If thou wilt enter life," says Jesus to the young ruler, "keep the commandments." But faith would have answered, "Lord, thou hast the words of life." The young ruler, however, may try the proposed remedy, and take the

servant and the staff with him, and go his way, but Paul, and faith, and this dear woman of Issachar, must cling to Jesus only.

There is a greatness in the work of the Spirit in her soul here, that is indeed blessed. Elisha had been already known to her in the quickening of her dead body. She had learnt him, or God's power through him, in that, and to that she now clings, in the face of every temptation. So with the sinner and Jesus. The sinner who believes has learnt the Son of God in His quickening power. He has understood the mystery of death and resurrection. He has been at Calvary, and at the empty sepulchre. He has seen there things, and known the meaning of them, for the full clearing of the conscience towards God. And no ordinance, as people speak, can take the place of them in the believer's soul. One may talk of new moons and sabbaths; another of the prophet's staff in the hand of a vicar or delegate; but the faith of a divinely taught sinner apprehends nothing but the precious, unchanging, imperishable virtue of Him who was dead and is alive again; from whom, as this dear woman did from Elisha, he has learnt where alone quickening, redeeming, saving power is of God to be received and enjoyed.

Sweet and fruitful indeed is this spot where the feet of the prophet oftentimes tarried, and where our thoughts, wearied with ourselves and the world, may as often turn to get refreshing in God!

IV. 38—41.

The incidents of our prophet's life are like so many emanations of glory through the cloud of his apparent poverty and nothingness in the world. And this was one character of the life of the Son of God on the earth.

Here we have a very bright expression of his ways, and of the ways of Him whom he foreshadowed.

There was "death in the pot;" death indeed where life should have been; death invading the place where life looked for its support and strengthening. But the prophet has the remedy for death here, as he had for the curse at Jericho. We know One of whom we sing,

"Where He displays His healing power,
Death and the curse are known no more."

And here, our prophet, the shadow of Jesus, has meal to cast into the pot, as before he had salt to cast into the waters, and both are healed. Moses typified this also at Marah, where he had the wood for the bitter waters. For the Son of God has cast Himself into the scene of death, and intercepted its course. He has come with His healing cross, and "destroyed him that had the power of death." "By His stripes we are healed." There is a cry at the discovery of the death that has entered, but the Son of God has answered it. We eat of what in our wilfulness we had gathered, but Jesus changes the feast, and gives us meat indeed and drink indeed, on which we live even in the time of dearth.

Death and the curse are altogether at the disposal of Him who has cast Himself into the scene and action

of this world on our side. "I have the keys of hell and of death," says He; and His strength shall rescue creation from the curse, and cast death itself into the lake of fire.

Why, we may ask with amazement of soul, did we ever gather our wild fruit and bring death in? Why did we not sit at the feast as it was first spread for us?

For what a miniature picture of the whole great mystery does this little incident give us! What has Adam done? what has Christ done? Have we not the answer here? The prophet prepared a feast. Though it were a time of dearth, he had resources. He had pottage for his guests, and the pot was seething on the fire. But there was some one, it matters not who, save that it was neither the prophet nor his servant, who thought to improve the feast, and officiously and intrusively gathered some wild gourds. But his gourds brought death into the prophet's pot. And what did Adam but this? The Lord, the Creator, had spread a feast, rich and dainty, and abundant for him, in Eden, but Adam must needs improve it. He gathers wild fruit, something that the Lord had not ordained for the table, something in addition; but he spoils every thing, and brings death into the pot; death upon that board which the Lord had loaded with the sweetest, richest, food of life!

The prophet, however, had the remedy, and heals the pot, and then his guests retake their seat at the feast with only fresh appetite to still more savoury meat. It is now a *healed* table, and not a *spread* table merely. They may admire and love the man and his resources, who could then, in unupbraiding grace

restore their good things, the good things which in their wanton pride they had thought to improve, but had utterly ruined and defiled. Is not this Jesus and ourselves, I ask? Do we not sit at a *healed* table? "The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." We are at a happier table than the bowers of Eden would ever have shaded. We sit at the feast of the *Redeemer* with new affections. We admire the *healing* as well as the *creating* virtue of His power, and lose ourselves in love and praise at the thought of the unupbraiding grace that has thus repaired the mischief.

IV. 42—44.

In the preceding little narrative we saw in our prophet a bright expression of the power of the Son of God in meeting the power of death. It was as the stronger man entering after the strong, to spoil him—the power of life casting itself into the place of death, to clear away death and destroy it.

Here we have a gentler expression of the power of the same glorious Jesus. It was still the same time of dearth as before. (verse 38). But with twenty barley loaves and some ears of corn, the prophet feeds a hundred men, to the amazement of his servitor—as afterwards Jesus fed five thousand with five barley loaves, and two small fishes, to the amazement of His disciples: and fragments were left after both meals, that we might know the aboundings of our Father's house, that there is there "bread enough, and to spare." For we have to go to Him as one who has overflowing *treasures* as well as overflowing *affections*. We are straitened nei-

ther in Himself nor in His resources. "His love is as large as His power," (and I may add, His power as His love), "and knows neither measure nor end."

There is a difference, however, not only in the *size* of these two miracles, if I may so speak, of Elisha and of Jesus, but in the *style and bearing* of them. Elisha feeds the people "according to the word of the Lord," Jesus by His own word. Elisha says, "thus saith the Lord, they shall eat, and shall leave thereof;" but Jesus says, "Make the men sit down." The glories are thus diverse. Jesus was, "the word," according to whom Elisha fed the people. Elisha carried the name of the Lord with him, but Jesus was Himself the Lord, and bore about with Him, and exercised, the rights and authority of His own name.

V.

Various, as well as striking and significant, are the glories that shine along the path of our prophet. Every stage tells out some great and new secret of God.

In this history we have, it seems, all the leading truths of the mystery of God's grace simply, yet strikingly, illustrated. A parable this of very rich instruction.

In the person of *Naaman* we get man in his best estate. Naaman must have been the world's envy, the great favorite of the day. He was made much of, as we speak, by every one, by the king himself, and all the nation. The Lord in endowments and providences had greatly signalised him. But "he was a Leper"

There was a stain on all his glory which no hand but God's could remove; and let the world flatter him as it might, it was a witness, a constant witness, to himself, that all was not right.

And such indeed is man. Let him be advantaged as he may in circumstances, or set off as he may by embellishments and attractions, there is a witness against him still.

In the *little captive* whom we next see, we get just the opposite of Naaman. All was against her in circumstances. She had been dragged from friends and home, and was a bondwoman in a stranger's house and land: but she carried a secret, the very opposite of Naaman's secret. She had the witness of God for her, as he had His witness against him. She knew the *healing*, while he felt the *sore*. This was a mighty difference; yea, all the difference, if God be considered. To have Him *for* and not *against* us, is surely the grand circumstance after all. And so was it here. And so is it with every true Israelite like her: in the knowledge of the same secret, in the knowledge of that *healing* of God, they can say, if God be *for* me, who can be against me!

These are valuable lessons in this parable. But we have others. *The king of Syria* is next introduced; and he represents man in his loftiness of thought and self-esteem, even in religion. He judges, to be sure, that nothing can be done for the divine healing of his favorite captain, but through him and his resources. Who but he? who but the king? was the language of his heart. He therefore prepares his silver, his gold, and his raiment, and writes a letter with his own hand

on this business to the king of Israel. A king to a king. For nothing less than such patronage can give fair promise of blessing.

All this is worldly religion, man's thoughts about God's ways. But there is nothing that the king of Syria does that is not simply "labour lost." His own personal patronage and gifts, and the countenance he sought of a brother king, all is religious vanity. And the king of Israel, who had the advantage of God's revelation in his country, is able to refuse to take his place, or act his part, in this grand purpose and thought of the king of Syria.

There is, however, one higher than the king in all this, though the Syrian knows nothing of him. *Elisha* had, of course, passed the notice of this great man of the earth. But *Elisha* who is now, also, in his turn, introduced to us in the history, is Naaman's only hope, in this day of his leprosy. And *Elisha*, conscious that the power of God was with him, makes no stir, or difficulty, as the king had done. He has not, like *One* afterwards, the authority of his own word to cleanse away this stain, but he is in the secret of God's ordained remedy, and he can, with authority, preach that to the leper.

For here I may notice how *Jesus* shines above all. When the leper comes to Him, it is not as with the king, "Am I God, that I should heal a man of his leprosy?" nor is it as with the prophet, "Go wash in Jordan, and be clean." No; but He reveals Himself at once in the place and power of God. "I will, be thou clean." *Elisha* was but a *preacher of Jesus* to Naaman. *Jesus* was the *leper's cleansing, healing, God*: as John, or

the brightest of them, is but the bridegroom's friend, Jesus the only bridegroom.

And then in this same picture, we see another object of the deepest interest to us. I mean *the poor convicted leper passing through his cleansing*. At first, nature is strong in him. He resents the remedy which grace had provided—a remedy most simple but most humbling. So simple that there was no mistaking it, and no difficulty in applying it, saving the difficulty which man's pride and previous thoughts had opposed to it. But these give battle at once.

But grace can plead with a slow reluctant heart, as well as provide for a leprous body. Grace can use a ministry, as well as open a fountain, for sinners. And that ministry, like the remedy, is simple and artless, and as such fitted to its end. Naaman's servants, in their way, met the risings of nature in their master, and their word or ministry is blest; the proffered fountain is tried, its virtues are proved, and the flesh that was leprous became like that of a little child. It is more than restoration. It is resurrection. Jordan was a true baptism to this Syrian. He dies, and lives again, he is buried and rises again, and comes forth not merely as a *healed*, but as a *new* creature.

And what is the fruit of this new condition in which he finds himself? Here we trace the parable still, and get the great principle of God's way still illustrated.

1. *He stands before Elisha with all his company*. It is not now the proud, but the humble Naaman. Sweet fruit this of the new man that Naaman had become! He is humbled because he is washed.

2. *He makes a goodly confession to the name of the*

one only God. He takes Him for *his God*: he had learnt Him through the health and salvation He had given him. And this is the way that the new creature ever learns Him—the only way He can be learnt, or known in this world.

3. *He presses his gifts, whatever he had, on the prophet*—not now, as the king his master thought, to purchase the healing, but because of the healing. He had been forgiven, and *therefore* he loved.

4. *He will henceforth know no other God*—and in order to that, he seeks materials to raise him an altar. God must be his God, even in the midst of infidel Syria, where he is returning. Him and Him only will he worship. For this “mule’s burthen of earth” was for the end of erecting, as it were, another Ed beyond the Jordan. (See Josh. xxii. 34). It was to bear witness in the distant land of Syria, that this citizen of that country, like the Ethiopian eunuch, had cast in his lot with Israel, and had come, like Ruth the Moabitess, to trust under the wings of the God of Israel.

And lastly—*he gets a renewed conscience all quick and sensitive of the least, even apparent, departure from the God who had now blessed him.* He dreads the appearance of evil. He would not have it thought that any tendance of his on his master was recurring to the old principles of Syria, and the house of Rimmon. Such he had left, and left for ever, through God’s grace, and would now, at the very entrance on his new creation in Christ Jesus, enter a protestation against every thing that might even look otherwise.

This narrative, therefore, which thus occupies an important place in the ministry of our prophet, and is the

scene in his labours taken up and referred to by his divine Master afterwards (Luke iv.), is one of extensive value to us, so clearly, and fully exhibiting the dealing of God with each of us. Let us, with all simplicity of heart, assure ourselves, that all was written for our learning—that our God has from the beginning been allowing things to happen to others, that we might be admonished and comforted by them.

But there is one other point in this scene which I observe. The prophet (ver. 26), does not challenge Gehazi on the ground of his having lied to Naaman, but on quite another form of evil that was in his conduct. And there is, I believe, great force and beauty in this. “Is it a time,” says Elisha to his servant, “to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men servants and maid servants?”

This was an ingredient in the sin which belonged rather to *the Spirit* to notice—the lie was of common moral apprehension.

The Gentile had just been learning the grace of the God of Israel. The talents of silver, and pieces of gold, and changes of raiment, which the King of Syria had sent into the land of Israel, had been despised by the prophet, and Naaman was bearing them all, to the utmost “thread or shoe-latchet,” home with him again. He had gone to the waters without money and without price, and was the witness that the gift of God was not to be purchased with money.

Terrible, then, was it to have all this testimony confounded. Well might the prophet ask, was *this* a time to take the Syrian’s money? Could any thing be more

grievous to the Spirit? The lie, it is true, was abominable—the lie first to Naaman, and then to Elisha himself—it was all abominable. But what shall we say of this sad counter-testimony, this clouding of the brightness of the grace of God, this giving occasion to them that might seek occasion?

This was the offence which the Spirit noticed, and the prophet challenged. Gehazi had sold the honour of the rich and free grace of the Lord of Israel to the reproaches of an injurious world. At least, he had done all he could to this end. His money must therefore perish with him. He must be put outside the borders of the camp; for he who could thus falsify the God of Israel, was unfit to be of the Israel of God.

The parable of the unmerciful servant reads the same warning to us. The grace of the Gospel was there insulted—and the man that exposed it to reproach was cast into *outer* places like the leprous Gehazi. It was the energy of the dear Apostle, on the other hand, to reflect and set off that grace continually. Read his ways, in Acts xx. 33—35. For the *reasonable* service is this:—"be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father that is in heaven is perfect." "Maintain the family character," as has been the paraphrase of that lovely word; but Gehazi was not jealous of its honour or praise, in the sight of the nations. Did he not count himself unworthy of a place in it?

This is the *serious* feature in this otherwise *happy* picture. And it is serious—that a man, like Gehazi, who had companied so long and so intimately with such a servant of God as Elisha, should have been so distant from his spirit!

This part of the story, however, brings out what, on the other hand, is comforting and encouraging—that the soul of the Syrian, though it has now passed the hour of its first love, and he is on his journey to his distant home, has not lost the generosity of that first hour. He alights at once on seeing the prophet's servant behind him, and without suspicion and without reserve, lays his treasures at the servant's feet, as he had, on the first moment, offered to do at the master's! O that on our journey the power of the first hour may continue to be felt!

VI. 1—7.

This is a simple domestic scene, and yet, according to the same wondrous ways of Elisha, calculated again to call the doings of the Lord Himself to mind. For whether it be Peter, or the iron, that stands on the face of the waters, both are equally contrary to nature; neither is there any natural alliance between the cause and the effect, between the casting in of a stick, and the swimming of the iron, as there was none afterwards between the putting clay on the eyes, and the restoring of sight; for it is neither the skill of the workman, nor the fitness of the instrument, that is to be considered, but the excellency of the power of God. How natural and easy was the behaviour of our Prophet here! He is, in a moment, one of a company that are busied about the simplest domestic concern! The great apostle of the Gentiles would gather sticks to help to make up the fire, and the Lord of prophets and apostles, even after He had risen from the dead,

would get ready the dinner on the sea shore! And yet what august power lay in their hands all the while. The apostle shakes a venomous beast into the very fire he was kindling, and the prophet makes the iron head of the ax to swim on the face of the water! O the beautiful, God-like, condescension of real power!

But I read another lesson here.

It has been observed, I believe, that, properly speaking, there is "nothing either great or little with God,"—His nature opposes the thought. That may be so. But we are less able to infer consequences or truths from God's *nature* than from His *revelation*. Indeed we dare not assume to know His nature, but from His revelation. From His revelation, however, we are led, in some sense, to see this to be a truth, that there is nothing either great or little with Him.

We may trace some expressions of this in all His ways.

At creation, so to illustrate it, the wing of an insect was framed with the same care, as the heavens or the earth. The small and the great, in that way, then stood before Him.

In settling the nation of Israel, protection for the roof of the houses by battlements, lest blood should be shed, was ascertained by a divine oracle, with as full and clear decision as the services of the sanctuary or the allotments of the tribes.

Jesus, in His ministry, would take the little children in His arms, as He would His most honored disciples up to the mount of glory. This was still of the same character.

So, in feeding and ordering the churches afterwards—

the details between men and women, old and young, with other relations, are attended to by the same Spirit, who was at the same time revealing mysteries kept secret from the foundation of the world. He gives directions about taking a little wine for the stomach's sake, as He would unfold the inheritance of the Father of glory in the saints.

And it is the grace of the Holy Ghost in this equal care about the great and the little things, which has especially dwelt on my heart at this time. For though His due, yea and happy work, is to take of the things of the Father and of Christ, and to shew them to us, still He turns to matters of discipline for the comfort of the weakest of us. And is not this done, to speak after the manner of men, at some personal cost? "Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, to go to be promoted over the trees?"

The blessed Spirit's joy is to deal with *Jesus*. But in His grace, He consents to deal with *all the possible exigencies of the saints*.

And thus indeed it is: Whether the divine action be in creation, in providence, or in redemption,—whether it be in Israel, or in the churches, whether dispensationally it be the Father, the Lord, or the Holy Ghost, still we see the big and the little equally the care of God,—the great and the small standing alike before Him.

This is to be observed also in more private actings of our God. By His prophet (as we have in this passage), He will raise an ax's head from the water, because the recollection that it was borrowed was distressing the mind of one of the prophet's companions.

So the Lord (as another once observed), encourages His people to pray that "their flight might not be in the winter," simply, of course, because flight in that season would be the more uneasy and difficult; thus shewing His care about the most ordinary conveniences of His saints, as well as about their troubles and anxieties. The little scene in this passage, as I have said, is one illustration of this.

And what is all this? It is not merely the *condescension of power*, though that is beautiful, but the *grace of benevolence*. It is because these little things concern our comfort and present well-being, that they are thus waited on. And we, in our measure, should be imitators of this. It may not be the delight of the spiritual, nay it cannot, to forsake the sweetness and good fruit of the doctrine of the Father and of Christ, for matters touching the discipline of the saints—to be promoted over such thorns and briars as they are—but still, this pattern of divine benevolence, which thus parcels itself out on things, be they great or small, provided they do but concern others, puts it upon us, as our duty. "Be ye imitators of God," it is written, "as dear children." "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

VI. 8.—23.

I have already observed, that testimony against evil, and consequent suffering, marked the history of Elijah—power, and the gracious use of it, the ways of Elisha.

According to this, many instances of combined power

and grace in Jesus stand reflected in the doings of Elisha.

In the scene that lies before us here, we have recollections of our Lord strongly brought to mind. He had twelve legions of angels at command, had He pleased, and so a mountain full of horses and chariots wait on our prophet. And the simplicity of his faith is very remarkable. He needed not prayer for himself; he had already seen "the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (ii. 2), and rested in the certainty that they were, at any time, ready for his use,—and now, in the time of his need, he knows that they are at hand.

He has not therefore to pray for himself. All he does is to desire for his servant, that he may stand on the same elevation of faith.

Elisha had seen, as I said, these horses and chariots of Israel already. He knew that the God of Jeshurun rode on the heavens for Jeshurun's help, and he would have his servant's thoughts in the present hour of danger full of the same sense of this divine security. These chariots and horses of fire which fill the mountain, and which in the day of the translation of Elijah were accompanied by a whirlwind, were, I doubt not, a host or constellation of angels, those heavenly creatures, which, excelling in strength, stand in the presence of God, or go forth to minister on account of those who are heirs of salvation. For of them we read that "God maketh His angels spirits (winds) and His ministers a flame of fire"—and again, "the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." At the divine behest, they get ready to serve

in whatever the exigency of the saint or the occasion under the throne of God may require. They formed a travelling chariot to convey Elijah to heaven, and to carry Lazarus to Abraham's bosom. They now form chariots of war, when Elisha is beleaguered by the hostile bands of Syria. Either singly or in company they visit the elect on earth, and either alone or in concert celebrate the joy of heaven in the audience of the earth. They have drawn the sword, to smite a guilty city, or with the strong hand of love dragged the too reluctant one forth from the doomed city. They are either as winds or as fire. They are messengers of mercy, and executors of judgment, as "the Lord" who "is among them" may command. They attended on Mount Sinai when the law was published, and they hovered over the fields of Bethlehem when Jesus was born. And here, in their order and strength, they are as a wall of fire, a wall of salvation, round about our prophet.

Very blessed all this is. And still more blessed to know, that ere long, the hidden glories, which are now only known to such faith as Elisha's, will become the manifested things; and the threatenings of the enemy, the noise and the din and the clang of arms, which are the present apparent things, full of fears and sorrows for the heart, shall have rolled by, like the past thunder-storm, but to leave the sunshine the brighter.

But there is more than this calmness and certainty of faith. We have traces of the power and of the grace of Jesus in this path of our prophet.

"When the wicked, mine enemies and my foes, cam

upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." Thus David spake concerning Jesus. (Psalm xxvii.) And accordingly, in the garden, when the band of men and officers came to lay hold on Him, "as soon as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground." (John xviii.) So here with our prophet. The bands of Syria came to Dothan to fetch him, but the Lord smote them with blindness, as they were making ready to make him their prey.

Thus the glory of power in the Lord was reflected in Elisha. But the measures of this glory were, again, as we have seen before, diverse. Elisha sought the Lord's power in this, Jesus stands in that of His own person, and the enemy equally bows before it. "As soon as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground." But there is the *grace*, as well as the *power* of the Son of God here. The Lord, in His day, refuses to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax. He refuses to use His strength and authority even for the righteous judgment of His foes. He will not strive nor cry, nor let His voice be heard in the streets, but, "suffering thus far," He overcomes evil with good. And so Elisha. He had the bruised reed, the smoking flax, at his mercy, but he will not break nor quench it. "My father, shall I smite them," says the King, as he had the Syrian bands caught in the net of Samaria. But the prophet answered, "Thou shalt not smite them;—set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."

Blessed and precious expression of the mind of

God! And thus do the ways of the Lord in combined power and grace get their image in the ways of this honoured prophet. How much he was in the intimacy of God, if I may so speak! How fully in His friendship, knowing His secrets! And how largely does his history illustrate those words, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets." (Amos iii. 7). He knew of mountains of strength and salvation that were altogether invisible to others: he knew of abundance at the doors to-morrow, though to-day all was famine and death in the city. And if he be not told every thing (such was the marvellous condescending love of the Lord to him, and with which his soul was familiar), it is rather his wonder. (See iv. 27.) And so of each of us, (not honoured prophets, but the weakest saints), it may as really be said, "we have the mind of Christ." O for power in our souls to value such goodness in Him, and such dignity and blessing in ourselves!

VI. 24—VII.

We have in this portion of our prophet's history, something of very peculiar significancy. The richest ways of divine grace are illustrated in this striking picture of Samaria's misery and deliverance.

The siege of that city by the army of Syria had reduced it to the extremest wretchedness. An ass's head was worth eighty pieces of silver, and mothers were compelled to feed upon their offspring.

One need not draw the picture of misery to greater

length than this. Here it is in all its horror. It reminds one of Legion in the Gospels: another picture of what the unmitigated and unchecked power of the great captivator could do, with all of us.

But man is further disclosed in this history. He is seen in the character of his mind, as well as in his misery, and state of captivity to his ruthless destroyer. "God do so, and more also, to me," says the king of Israel, "if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day."

This was man charging on God, (or His servant, the same thing), all the mischief that was occurring. It was like Adam at the beginning of our sin,—“the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” It was laying the sin and the sorrow on that head which alone was clear and free of it all.

This was the accomplishing of sin. Like the cross of Christ, this was the height of evil. This was just the moment of Samaria's fullest iniquity. But like the same cross of Christ, this same moment was just the occasion for the display of the divine grace. The ruin was complete, and without hope from man. Then it is that Elisha's lips are opened with a promise, and he delivers a word from the Lord.

For if the power of Israel be gone, and there is none shut up nor left, will not the Lord repent Himself concerning His servants? (Deut. xxxii. 36). If God sees that there is no man, no intercessor, will not His own arm bring salvation? If the enemy come in like a flood, will not the Spirit lift up a standard against him? (Isa. lix. 16—19). And such was this moment

in Samaria. Such a moment was the moment of God's glorious grace—that where sin abounded, there grace more abounded—that, as in the cross of Christ man was at the height of his rebellion, and God was also at the height of the glory of his goodness, so now, when the sin and misery of Samaria were at the full, the cup of divine blessing was now also about to flow over. “Then Elisha said, hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, to-morrow about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.”

“In the gate of Samaria!” Truly precious that thought is to the needy soul—blessed notice of the grace of the gospel! Salvation is not to be sought for either in heaven above or in the depths beneath. It has *come* to us. The sin-offering lies at the door. The Israelite need not leave the lintel of his own house to accomplish the full security of that house from the sword of the destroyer. Grace *brings* the relief which grace has *provided*. The fine flour and the barley were to be had by the famished people *at the very gate of their city!* (See Rom. x. 6—8).

How are the shining foot-marks of the salvation of God to be traced in all this, beloved. “Mercy for fetching,” as one of old said, “nay, for desiring, nay, for nothing but receiving.”

This appears to me to be very striking indeed. And this was Elisha's glory in this scene; he knew the mind of God. The wicked heart of man was working its worst. Like Caiaphas, the king of Israel was laying the mischief, as I have observed, on the only one r

was really clear of it; as the high priest gave counsel that one must die for the people lest the whole nation perish; and that One must be He who alone was unguilty of all the nation's sorrow. (John xi.) But then it is that God's remedy reveals itself. Then it is, that grace abounds. And instead of the ass's head being bought for eighty pieces of silver, a measure of flour and two measures of barley should now be bought for one shekel in the gate of the self-destroyed city.

But if we have thus before us, the height of human evil met by the aboundings of divine grace, we have also the varied way in which this grace is entertained in the world.

It meets with rejection from some. The nobleman exhibits that to us. He would not believe that God could do all His prophet was now pronouncing.

There was a lion in the way. If windows were to be opened in heaven, this might be; but who ever heard of windows in heaven? And this is all said just in the spirit of unbelief; in the evil temper of the heart of men who refuse to receive good tidings of great joy from God; who will not have happy thoughts, nor entertain filial, holy confidence towards Him; but who, when He speaks of pardon and blessing, reject the grace, and will rather cleave to their own hard notions of such grace being a thing impossible: so ignorant, so alien from the life of God, is the heart of man.

There is a generation, however, who have no other hope. A people who have spent all on physicians for the healing of their plague, and are not a whit better.

There are lepers outside the camp still—poor convicted sinners, “too bad for any but Jesus,” as one once said. Death is before, behind, and around them. The Syrian host, as they judge, before—the famishing city behind—their own diseased leprous dead bodies encompassing them around. To such this grace comes in suited needed time. They find that it is *all* to them. It is either certain death for them, or this last, this only resource in God Himself. And such arise, and take the spoil. Their necessities throw them into the place where Christ has gained a victory.

Like the four lepers here. They had no help for it. Their very necessities, pressed in by deaths oft, death all around, threw them into the camp of the Syrians where the Lord, all single handed and alone, had been gaining a victory. For it was the Lord who had made the Syrian host hear a noise of chariots and horses, and thus alone had put them all to flight. Of the people of Israel there was none with him. It was “the day of the Lord.” Israel was dying in Samaria. The lepers were dying without. And God meets the Syrian host alone. And the poor lepers have nothing to do, but to arise and share the fruit of the Lord’s triumph. As the sinner, now. It has been entirely and altogether the victory of Jesus. None stood with Him, or for Him. Alone he met the enemy—alone He suffered the penalty—He drank the cup alone—the three hours of darkness fell from heaven, because He was made sin—He alone hung a curse upon the tree. And the gospel is the publishing of all this strife and triumph of Jesus, that sinners, dead as lepers, may come and

feed, and live for ever on that feast, that spoil of glorious war, which Jesus has won for them.

And what does their own joy communicate to them? a desire to divide the spoils. They spread the good tidings which they have themselves received, and by which they live. And there is no temper of soul that the spirit of the renewed mind more thoroughly condemns, than the selfishness of our old wretched nature. The working of it is so contrary to the glorious and generous grace of God in the gospel, that it leaves, when indulged, the tinge of fear behind it in the soul. "We do not well," said one of these lepers to the other, "this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." And they publish it at once, as in the high places.

All this exercise of heart is easily to be understood by the renewed mind which has tasted of, and been formed by, the grace of the gospel.—But there is more in this striking picture. We see weak or slow-hearted faith in the king. He *reasons* about the good tidings. He does not, in the bold unbelief and scorn of the nobleman, at once refuse them. But he reasons about them. "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." But grace abounds. Grace, as in the case of Naaman, can provide a minister as well as a treasury—and the slow-hearted king as well as the readier lepers, shares the spoils of the glorious victory of the Lord. And all the famishing city follow. "The lame take the prey." None come short but the unbelieving nobleman. Distrust of the

divine bountifulness alone cuts off in the day of this feast of Israel. All is accomplished. The measures of flour, and of barley, are sold in the gate, and the nobleman perishes alone in his unbelief.

The great things of the gospel of God, are thus illustrated in this very striking picture of Samaria's misery and deliverance, materials for our holy, profitable comfort and admonition. But not merely to investigate, and admire these skilful ways of the divine wisdom, may it be our purpose; but to mark and digest them, that our souls may be refreshed and our faith in the gracious provider for all our need, and all our delights for eternity, be blessedly strengthened!

VIII. 1—6.

From this short notice of another path in the ways of our prophet, we see how intimate he was with the mind of God. For here we are reminded again of that scripture, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."

The famine must be told to Elisha now, as to Joseph, and Agabus, and others, in older or more recent times. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" was the language of the same gracious Lord who thus treats His people as friends. It was the mind and the hand, the counsels and the strength, of the Lord, which our prophet so gloriously carried with him.

And we find all his riches still used in grace to others. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." Abraham used it to

the profit of others, and knowing the purposed judgment interceded for the righteous remnant in Sodom. So Elisha here. He heard of the coming famine, and he warned the godly woman of Shunem to provide for her household against it.

Her circumstances are changed from what they once were. This loved and honoured woman has, apparently, become a widow; her little child, the gift of God to this daughter of Sarah, has grown up. But the famine has separated them from their home and their fields in the land of Issachar. (See chap. iv.) And she had once loved her mercies there. She "dwelt among her own people." She valued not the court or its patronage then; nor does she now seek it, save to be restored to the same simplicity of her home and her own people. And, surely, we may judge, that "the little chamber on the wall" helped to draw back her recollections and desires to that loved place, where she had known the quickening and resurrection strength of her Lord and Saviour by the hand of His chosen servant.

Gehazi is in other circumstances also. It may be that the root of the matter is in him still. "But he is a leper." He is separated from the prophet of God now. It was not *famine*, however, but *covetousness* that did this. He has now only to *recollect*, but no longer to *witness*, "the great things" of Elisha. Happy, if in repentance he can tell of them with holy delight to the king—happier, had constancy in faith and in the spirit kept him still in company with his master. But he had wronged his own soul, as we all do in our way and measure, beloved: "Blessed is the man that

heareth me," says Wisdom, "watching *daily* at my gates, waiting at the posts of my door; for whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul." And gracious is it in the Lord to give us this parting look at him. We may hope that as he had once pierced himself through with many sorrows, (1 Tim. vi.), so now, that money is no longer the thing on his heart or on his lips, but recollections of Elisha. For the Lord here graciously seems to use him again, and make him helpful to this dear and godly friend of the prophet in the day of her necessity. Happy is it to receive from the hand of the Lord such a pledge of His restoring grace, though His Spirit be so grieved with the backslidings of His people! O that we may praise Him for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! *

"A word spoken in due season, how good is it," we may almost say of the incident in this little passage. Gehazi and the king were talking of the Shunamite, as the Shunamite came up to the place where they were. And how often have we occasion to notice like happy coincidences! There are scarcely any who have not to recount such things at times in their history. "We were just speaking of you," has been again and again said to one suddenly making his appearance in the midst of a little knot of friends. And faith will

* I am aware that this introduction of Gehazi may not be favourable to him, in the judgment of some. They may think that it is a symptom of his being still a man of the world, and covetous, because he is found here attached to the court, and apparently in some confidence with the king. It may be so. But still I rather gather the above impression from the scene in which we here find him taking his part.

own the mercy of such harbingers casting up the highway, and making straight the crooked paths, which lead to some desired blessing, as in this case before us. And faith will not complain that it is not *always* so. For faith says "it is well," when providences either *help* or *cross* us.

"Tis well when at the throne,
We wrestle, weep, and pray;
'Tis well when at His feet we groan,
Yet bring our wants away."

Tis an equal hand of love that takes the thorn out of the flesh, or leaves it there untouched.

VIII. 7—15.

We have here, as in the preceding case, an instance of the intimacy of the prophet with the counsels of the Lord. What daily communications there must have been between them!—Indeed, in the history of the Church of God, glorious revelations have been vouchsafed to those faithful ones, who stood obedient, witnessing, and suffering remnants in evil times. Thus to Ezekiel and Daniel among the captives. What extended vision of divine purposes was opened to them! So when Zechariah, Haggai, and their companions, began in honesty of heart and in spite of enemies, to work at the house of the Lord as His faithful remnant returned out of captivity, what thoughts and scenes of coming glory are made to pass before them. As still more marvellously afterwards, in like manner, before John in Patmos, where he was a companion in the

kingdom and patience of Jesus. And Elijah and Elisha were of the same. They were, each of them in his season, the godly remnant of their day, and had very precious the eye, the ear, and the lips of the Lord opened to them.

But from this passage in his history we find that Elisha had honour beyond the limits of Israel. We see him in Damascus, and his arrival is soon reported to the king, and honoured by him. The case of Naaman may have given him this introduction to the honour and confidence of the Syrian court,—and is some evidence of the testimony which that healed leper, that converted sinner of the Gentiles, had borne to the name of the God of Israel, so that at least the Syrian king does not now again look to the *king* (see chap. v. 5), but to the *prophet* of Israel.

But there is another point of moral value to our souls that shews itself here. I mean in the character of Hazael; and I must notice it.

Hazael had come to Elisha with an inquiry from the Syrian king his master, about the disease under which the king was then suffering. Elisha tells him to say to his master, “thou mayest surely recover.” But having given him this answer to the king’s inquiry, he adds another word, addressed merely to Hazael himself, “howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die.”

On hearing this, we read that Hazael “settled his countenance stedfastly until he was ashamed.” *This was hypocrisy.* Under the eye of our prophet, before the truthful mind of the man of God, this shew of his

countenance witnessed against him. He feigned sorrow at the prophet's prophecy of Benhadad's death.

The prophet himself, during this little moment of Hazael's practising grief, appears to have been following the course of divine inspirations through his own soul, and weeps at the prospect of all the evil which this Hazael would do to Israel when he got into power—for into such scenes the inspiration he was now under was leading him. But this sorrow was genuine, as Hazael's was hypocritical. It was the unforced fruit of a heart made sorry at the divine vision which his eye was then resting on.

But after a little more intercourse between them, which I will not notice, Hazael returns to Benhadad, and mis-states to him the prophet's answer to his inquiry. The prophet had said, "thou mayest surely recover"—thereby intimating that there was nothing in the disease itself that was fatal; and then he added, "the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die"—thereby intimating that Benhadad was to perish by other means than the disease. Hazael, however, now tells the king that the prophet had said, "he should surely recover." Here was the mis-statement or the lie of this hypocrite. But the end strikingly shews the full unmixed truth of the prophet's words—for the disease does not kill the king, but other means, the hand of this murderous Hazael. And thus he *might* have recovered, but he *surely* dies, as the prophet had spoken.

This enigmatic style of the answers or oracles of the Spirit are worthy of our admiration. There was something like it in our prophet's word upon the un-

believing nobleman—"behold thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." For however strange this might sound in the ear, to the letter it was made good. "So it fell out to him, for the people trod upon him in the gate, and he died"—i. e. in the very act of bringing their barley and their flour *under his own eye*, the crowd crushed him to death. (See chap. vii.) So here—the words "mayest recover" and "surely die," are made true by the event, though they sounded strange to the ear.

The case, however, of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, is still more remarkable. Jeremiah had said of him, that his eyes should behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and that he should go to Babylon. (Jer. xxxiv. 3). Ezekiel had said, that he should go to Babylon, but should not see it, though he should die there. (Ezek. xii. 13). Almost on the verge of impossibility all this seemed to be. But to the utmost jot and tittle all this was accomplished. They were the words of the *lips* of Him whose *hand* is wonderful and mighty, and sovereign in all its operations. (See Jer. xxxix.)

This, however, only as we pass. In the history of this scripture on which we have now been meditating, we have indeed an awful picture of human selfishness and hypocrisy. And it is admonitory to us all. A look may be deep hypocrisy, as a word may be. And our watching and prayer should be, that the searching Spirit may find truth in the inward parts, and truth about us every where, in every look and motion.

VIII. 16—29.

We have nothing of *Elisha* here, and therefore I do not notice it.

IX.—X.

Our prophet is not the principal object here. But he is seen. And the whole history, being one of very deep moral value, I would not pass it by.

It is another solemn lesson. It affords us an awful illustration of the doctrine of scripture, that the Lord may use, instrumentally or ministerially, those in whom personally He takes no delight. This is a solemn fact. Balaam could never have stood in the mind or sympathies of God. But Balaam the prophet is used, as is also Saul the king, and Judas the apostle.

Our souls may well pause over truth like this, and be admonished. "Have we not *prophesied* in Thy name? I never *knew* you." No communion in spirit, though the hand or the tongue may have been used by the Lord.

And this clearly shews itself in Jehu. The hand of this captain is used, but there is no communion between him and the Lord. He goes through his service. He executes his commission to the full. But there is no expression whatever of a soul exercised towards God. He takes up and lays down most solemn and important transactions, and all of them, too, in the name and at the command of the Lord; but there is no exercise of heart as in the sanctuary, or presence of God.

And this is just what marks the man whom God can use ministerially, but in whom He can have no joy personally. *All* may be used in this *dead* way: *knowledge* as well as *services* may be taken up,—taken up by a dead intellect, as in a dead hand. For what is knowledge, if used as a mere material? Jehu had both. He had knowledge and strength; he had an understanding that could apprehend the divine decrees touching the house of Ahab, and a hand ready to execute them. But it was a dead intellect, and a dead hand. No divine life or grace filled or moved either. And with us, knowledge will be but the same, if it be not the occasion of awakening divine affections. Jesus' knowledge ever made Him enter into and reflect the divine counsels. But there is nothing of this in Jehu. He can talk of God's purposes, and execute them; but there is no communion with God through all his actions.

And here I would turn to look at something in full moral contrast with all this, and which shines beautifully in the spirit of Elisha.

He told his messenger, that as soon as he had poured the oil on Jehu's head, he was to open the door and flee, as though he were to have no communion with Jehu. Like the man of God who was not to have sympathy with the place he was sent to curse. (See 1 Kings xiii. 9). He had a business to do with Jehu, weighty business; but that was all. And in this Elisha blessedly stands in kindred feeling with God Himself. We have already seen how gloriously he carried in him both the *mind*, and *power* of God, revealing the one, and exercising the other; but in this case he shews

that he carried the *tastes*, the *senses*, of the blessed God also.

This is truly to be desired by our souls. We are much to covet this holy attainment. God had no *personal* joy in Jehu, though he may use him, as I have already noticed. So, Elisha had no *personal* joy in him, though by divine command he anoints him.

And in this Elisha stands distinguished from Jehonadab. It is not that Jehonadab was not faithful. It is not that he was not a separated one, a saint of God. But he is not in Elisha's elevation, as Lot was not in Abraham's, or Obadiah in Elijah's. Jehonadab has not this divine sense of what Jehu was. He gets up into his chariot. He strikes hearts with him, if I may speak so. He rejoices in his work. But Elisha and the Lord have no delight in him. "Open the door, and flee, and tarry not," was the prophet's word to his messenger.

But this may turn to holy admonition, and lead us earnestly to desire of our God this precious sympathy with Himself; this companionship with the divine enjoyments, tastes, and loathings. This was a deep work of the Spirit in the prophet's soul. He had much beside; the mind and the power of God, as I have said, were with him. But O this introduction of his soul into the divine sense of things and persons! This was a beautiful fruit of the Spirit's path and husbandry within him. This was divine. He could, like God Himself, travel the whole course of Jehu's action, and yet take no *personal* delight in him. But so it was not with Jehonadab. The senses of the spiritual mind were not so lively in him. And these differences we see continually.

This character, however, in Jehu is very solemn. There is no fragment of a broken heart—no outgoings of desire—no sense of the divine honour about him. He can even remind Bidkar of the day in which they both rode after Ahab in the days of his blood and covetousness, (when the Lord laid the righteous burden upon him), with an unmoved soul. His soul takes no part in the recollection. He has no sense of share in all the evil. So unlike Daniel or Nehemiah, who, rehearsing the sin of their people, their kings, their priests, and their prophets, still take their own place, and share in all the mischief. So unlike David also; who, though the judgment of another was making way for him to reach the throne, (as the judgment of Ahab's house was here preparing the like for Jehu), could see only the dishonour of the Lord's anointed—had no eye of joy for that throne which sparkled before it, but an eye of tears over that shame and fall of others which lay before it.

Thus is Jehu contrasted with those who are "of God" in similar scenes. And such contrast is that which lies between the flesh and the spirit, between a soul moved only by the corrupt principles of the world, and a soul ordered by the power and grace of God.

Still, however, it was a divine commission which he executes. But how awful in its character! On what a fearful journey does it send this sword of the Lord! From Ramoth to the vineyard of Naboth, from thence to the going up to Gur, from thence to Jezreel, from thence to the Shearing house, and from thence to Samaria, and all the road marked by blood! blood, too, appointed in righteousness to be shed. For though

the sword that shed it cared not for righteousness, yet in its action the Lord was pleading with the flesh of Ahab and his house—as, by and bye, He will have a greater pleading, even with *all* flesh, and the slain of the Lord shall be many. And what shall be the rapidity and the stretch of the divine judgment then! What will be the journey of the sword of the Lord, or “the grounded staff” in that day! when “as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.”

We may look at a moment of righteous judgment in this journey of Jehu. It is like the day of the Flood, or of Sodom, or of the Red Sea. Our souls, beloved, may afresh prize the precious blood that shelters us, and own also, with reverence, the way of Him to whom vengeance belongs.

Jehu executes the divine commission, it is true; but it served himself. The decree of God concerning Ahab was just that on which Jehu could get forward in the world. Like a true Pharisee, he would trade on religion, or use godliness as gain. Beyond that, it had no beauty for him, or power over him—and thus what religious zeal brought him, religious declension shall preserve to him. If he could give up Baal to get the throne, he can now give up Jehovah with as much ease to secure the throne. He can return to the calves of Jeroboam, after he has abolished the prophets of Ahab, that, as Jeroboam said, “the kingdom might not return to others.”

O the deep and serious lesson! May our souls ponder it—and seek an exercised heart and conscience in all service, and all knowledge, lest all be dead in our minds and hands!

XI.—XII.

Our prophet is not seen in these chapters, for the affairs of the kingdom of Judah are introduced; incidental to the affairs of Israel in this respect, that they give us an account of a great apostacy in that kingdom, and its judgment, just as the chapters which precede them gave us, as we saw, the judgment of apostacy in the kingdom of Israel. But besides—being very important in opening the counsels of God to us, I will consider them, though Elisha, our principal object, be not before us.

These chapters give us an account of that interruption to the enjoyment of the throne of Judah which the house of David suffered. And I doubt not it is expressive of the time now present, when the same thing may be said—that the seed and house of David are not in the occupation of the throne and power of David.

Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and of Jezebel, and, as I may call her, the Jezebel of Judah, was the instrument of accomplishing this iniquity. A murderer, idolater, and usurper, she completes the sin here, as Ahab and Jezebel did in Israel, till the wrath of God visits and removes her, as it had visited and removed them.

The seed royal was the object of her murderous designs, in order that she might seize the crown as her own, and (as she judged, perhaps, with infidel boldness) overthrow the divine promise to the house of David. (1 Kings ii. 4). Her act was like Ahab's in Samaria towards the vineyard of the righteous, or like that of

the whole nation afterwards towards the Lord of the vineyard, or the Heir of the kingdom.

But there is a secret purpose and power of God that frustrates all this. He has the resurrection of Jesus in order to bring to nought all the devices of the enemy, and so here, Joash, a child of resurrection, is used as His instrument for the like end. The sentence of death had gone out against him. He was as much involved in it as any of them who perished by it. But the Lord had deliverance prepared for him, as He had great purposes to accomplish by and in him, and he is therefore drawn out from the place of death, like Moses in such a case, by the daughter of a king, Jehoshabeath who had married the High Priest Jehoiada.

It is, however, much to be observed, that, being drawn thus out of the place of death, he is hid by the priest of God in "the house of the Lord," and that, too, "till the seventh year." This is a striking picture of the distant purposes of God concerning the true heir of the throne of Judah. For Jesus, being drawn from the place of death by resurrection, is hid during a whole age in the house of God, the heavens having now received Him as the High Priest of the present house of God; the concealment of this former heir of David for a time thus standing a fair and full expression of the present hiding of Jesus in the heavens. Surely I may say, this is "a sign and a wonder," something to be "wondered at," or treated as a type or a mystery.

But Joash is not to be always where the hand of Jehoiada had now secured him. In due season Jehoiada prepares a remnant in Judah to favour him, with whom

he makes a covenant in the house of the Lord, and to whom he shews "the king's Son." And after preparing them he uses them: he fits them out with weapons of war, and harness, for the day of battle, from the armoury of David, and sets them all in order, to hurl the bold and infidel usurper from the throne. And this is done with the same perfect and holy intelligence of God's mind, as the concealment in the sanctuary had been. No blood is to stain the Temple—the wicked are to be cut off in this day of righteous judgment without mercy—and "the king's Son" is to be brought forth from the house of the Lord. These three things are to be carefully observed on this great occasion. The king is to be enthroned, the wicked to be slain, but the Temple to be kept undefiled. All must be done according to God. And then, accompanied in all due solemnity by the power of his kingdom, the righteous in whom he could trust, and on the Sabbath day, the day prepared for his shewing to Judah, the king comes forth from his hiding place.

Jehoiada, who (as the priest, and the guardian of the young king during the time of the usurpation) now orders the whole matter of his coronation and manifestation, in the first place shews the heir of the throne to a chosen remnant. This he does in the secret place of the Temple. Then he marshals a line of body-guard from the house of the Lord to the house of the king, from the *Sanctuary* of the realm to the *Palace*. Their business was, to watch the king from his exit to his entrance, and along the whole passage from the one house to the other.

He is then brought forth from the Temple, and jus'

outside it, at the pillar, he is proclaimed amid the acclamations of the people, the testimony as well as the crown being given to him ; the one signifying to him his subjection to Jehovah, the other his sovereignty over Israel.

Athaliah the usurper is then slain—but beyond the ranges of the Temple. For even to the restoration of the king and the peace of the kingdom, the priest will not sacrifice the sanctity of the Temple. Beautiful witness of the Lord maintaining *all* His glories in all His ways, never clouding one during the shining of another. The covenant of all the people is then made, they accepting the king, and the king adopting them. All things that offend and do iniquity are then taken out of the way, the house, the altars, the images, and the priests of Baal. And at last, the king passes through the line of body-guards, all joyful in their service and tendance upon him ; and like another Solomon, in peace and dignity, full of honour and of the gladness of his people, he sits on the throne of the kingdom, the throne of the house of David.

Can any thing more beautifully express the return of Jesus from His heavenly sanctuary? For is He not to appear then in the midst of the strength and righteousness of His kingdom? and is not that to be a time when a Sabbath is again preparing for His Israel, and for the whole creation? Will it not, likewise, be the day of visitation on them that have shed the blood of the righteous, and corrupted the earth? Heaven will be opened, and that will be the day of Jesus' crowning, and His people's gladness ; as here, the priest anoints Joash, puts the crown on his head, and the testimony.

in his hand, according to the ancient ordinance of God ; (Deut. xvii.), while the people cry, "God save the king." The king shews himself in his beauty, and as alive from the dead ; and the wicked one, the usurper, and the murderer, perish in his presence.

Nothing could more exquisitely give us the distant glimpses of our true David than all this. We see, as it were, His descent from heaven, the house of the Lord, in power and glory. And it was the suited moment for such a type. For this usurpation of Athaliah was the full apostacy of Judah, the time for the Lord to come out again, as at Babel's and Gomorrah's iniquity of old, to punish the earth for its iniquity, and as the full result of that, to take to Him His own holy power and honour.

And the land is now again full of *David*. Not only had the guard of the king been armed with the spears and the shields of David, which had been kept apart, and allowed, as it were, to rust for want of use while the heir was hid in the sanctuary ; but now the ordinances of David, and the music of David, are observed and heard. (2 Chron. xxiii. 18). The priest is careful to fill the scene with recollections of David. And Baal and his servants are put away, and the God of Israel is in His place again. It is Jehovah the Lord, and David the servant, as it will be in the glorious anti-type, "every tongue confessing Jesus Lord, to the glory of God the Father." And a larger covenant is now struck as we have already observed. It is not merely the priest taking an oath of some in favour of the concealed Joash and shewing him simply to them. It is the priest bringing all the people, the king, and Jeho-

vah, into holy gracious covenant again, that they should be the Lord's people, and then shewing the rightful heir of all the glory, not to some, but to all the congregation of Israel. And thus was the city quiet, the people of the land rejoice, the king sits on the throne, and he and the priest restore the service and worship of the God of Israel.

This was the great restitution of all things. In this way things are totally changed. It is no longer the king hid in the house of the Lord, and a strange woman on the throne, as it were, riding the Beast, with Baal brought in, and the temple of the only true God in defilement and ruin; but the king has been brought forth and owned by his willing people, the usurper is judged, and the sanctuary and worship of the Lord are in honour and observance again.

But as with Solomon, so with Joash, this is only for a season. Adam lost Eden, after we get the fair type of Christ, and the Church, and the kingdom in him. So did Solomon lose the throne of David after he had served (in the hand of our blessed God who ever teaches us to profit), the glorious purpose of exhibiting in type the earthly honours and kingdom of the true Son of David. And Joash now, as soon as Jehoiada is gone, tarnishes all this brightness. But this we see, that as long as Jehoiada the priest lived, the kingdom was maintained by king Joash in its holiness and beauty. And what does this shew us? Does it not tell us that in the coming kingdom, when we shall see the King and the Priest together, all shall be well? As it is written, "He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne, and He shall be a priest upon His

throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." And because the Priest of that kingdom cannot die, being made "after the power of an endless life," and because the King of that kingdom cannot fail or do wrong, because His sceptre is one of righteousness, and it is said of Him, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity," therefore this peace and honour will abide through His times, till He have delivered up the kingdom. "In His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." "The government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of His government, and peace there shall be no end—upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever."

This is, indeed, a strong expression of the then distant things of Christ's glory, His return from the heavens, which is the Sanctuary of God, and His taking to Him judgment first, and then, His priestly, kingly honours, and dominion in the land of His ancient choice. Happy for our souls to dwell on any thoughts of Him; and therefore, though our prophet was not here, a greater than he being here, we have not passed it, nor judged these chapters an intruder on our path.

XIII. 1—19.

We now return out of Judah into the land of the ten tribes, and after an interval, the reign of Jehu

ahaz the son of Jehu, we get a sight of our prophet again.

Joash had succeeded his father Jehoahaz on the throne of Israel, and still did evil in the sight of the Lord, as Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and the rest of the kings before him. But in his days Elisha had fallen sick of his sickness whereof he afterwards died.

The longest day has its evening, it has been said, and said, too, of the ministry of our Elisha. He had gone through the reigns of Jehoram the son of Ahab, of Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash, having seen also the earlier times of Ahab and Ahaziah. Perhaps he had been a prophet of God for nearly sixty years. But the evening of his day was now come; his sun sets in brightest tints, and with a glow which was worthy of its meridian hour.

Joash, we read, came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." This may surprise us. But it is clear that there was no pretence, or mockery, or insincerity in all this. It was nature. Perhaps Elisha had been hitherto much neglected by this king of the house of Jehu. And in the prospect of his being taken away, there was, as was very natural, a quickening of conscience in him, and he accordingly seeks the dying prophet. Even Herod, a worse man than Joash, could do many things, and tremble at the thought of John being alive, as Joash here could at the thought of Elisha dying.

This was nature. Joash valued Elisha's presence in his kingdom. But beside that, he would honour Elisha, ere it was too late; for the remembrance that he had done

so might, when Elisha was gone, hinder some disquiet in his conscience. The prophet's sanctity, the power that had so often been owned in him, and the name and place he filled, enforced all this on his soul at such a moment as the present; and thus, not in mockery or pretence, but under this strong current of natural feelings, the king visits the dying prophet with the very same salutation with which this prophet himself had hailed the ascending Elijah.

But nature is not up to the elevation of the Spirit of God. "Stand fast *in the Lord*," is the word—and "I can do all things, through *Christ which strengtheneth me*," is the Apostle's only boast. We are not to glory, save in that which Christ works in us. And so, however promising things may be at the beginning of this scene, nature in Joash is not up to the occasion. He could not go through it, as Elisha had before done, in the power of the Spirit. The motions of nature carry us for a season apparently in that track, where the energy of the Holy Ghost would have us; but they will not bear us to the end with those who are in the same track in the Spirit. And so, though Elisha and Joash begin with the same language on their lips, there is distance between them.

But let me say, in connection with this admonition, that we must not question the goodness of God, though we may know the weakness and deceit of our own hearts. And there is this tendency in us. We are prone to suspect the sources of light or joy or strength, that may be in us at times. Our reasoning will tell us that simple nature and not the Spirit of God is in these things. We do what we can

to take the praise of our blessings from God, and to reason that good gifts come down from sources short of the Father of lights. But this should not be. The heart is deceitful indeed. But God is good. And in simplicity of faith we should accustom ourselves to trace our light, or joy, or strength of soul, to His Spirit, without the darkening and troubling reasonings of our own hearts.

All this may teach us. There is warning against nature, but consolation for us in God here. But there is something besides.

At the bidding of the prophet, the king takes the bow and the arrows, and does with them, according to the word of the prophet, the prophet interpreting the action to him. Then the king having taken the arrows, is ordered to smite the ground with them. But on doing so only three times, the prophet rebukes him. The man of God is wroth, and rebukes him, for he was grieved and disappointed. But why was this? Why this heat in the soul of Elisha? The reason is beautiful. He had just told the king that "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrows of deliverance from Syria" were in his hand: had his soul been in unison with the prophet, had it glowed with thoughts of that glory which was thus brought so nigh to him; had his heart sparkled at the sight of the Lord's own quiver then in his hand, how lustily would he have smitten the ground at the bidding of the prophet. Had Joash but valued the Lord's arrow as Elisha had valued his master's mantle, all would have been harmony of soul between them. But the king had not in spirit fallen into that current which was then

bearing the prophet along. The Spirit in him was not in the same fine flow that it was pursuing through Elisha, and, therefore, with slack hand he smote the ground but thrice. And O how much of this we know! Where is the fine rich fervency of heart which we find of old, the glow of soul, and power of utterance, which were known among our tried and suffering brethren in other days? What smiting on the ground again and again was there then, in company, as it were, with the soul of Elisha! But our hand is slack. The unction and the zeal, and the earnestness of the Spirit, express themselves in far feebler lines now, than they were wont to do in other days. Elisha had cried out as Elijah was leaving him, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof"—but he also took up the mantle of the prophet and smote the waters as the prophet had smitten them, to divide them hither and thither. The king can now come to Elisha as he is leaving him, and utter the same words, but there is no kindred smiting now. The king's heart is cold, and his hand is slack, where Elisha's had been fervent and bold.—"O Lord revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known."

We stand but little now-a-days in the rich and fervent power of the Spirit of God. Indeed one feels and sees this too plainly and sensibly. There may be extension in the field of vision, or multiplied truths dwelling in the thoughts of the saints, but the deep unctuous virtue of the truth itself is less felt. So that we may still say, "O Lord revive thy work!" As another has sung—

"The ancient days were days of might
 In forms of greatness moulded,
 When flowers of heaven grew on earth
 Within the church unfolded.
 For grace fell fast as summer dew
 And saints to giant stature grew."

XIII. 20—25.

This is the closing expression of the power of God in our prophet. But the way of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, is reflected here still. For by His death we live. To touch the dead body of Jesus, or, to have faith in His blood, is to be justified and live.

But it is not so much in that general way, as belonging to all sinners, that we get Jesus here. It is as in connection with Israel, whose prophet Elisha was, and the earthly man also, who takes his course in power through Israel and on the earth, after Elijah, the heavenly man, had been translated to his place on high. For so with Jesus. He will be for the succour and life and kingdom of Israel in the latter day, after He has accomplished His mercy and His purpose with the Church, His heavenly witness.

And as the man of grace and power for Israel, we here see our prophet doing his last service. Israel was now in confusion before the face of their enemies. They were put to the worse by the Moabites. The most they can do is to bury their dead, and we know, that is the service of the dead—"Let the dead bury the dead." This is shortly, but strikingly, marked as their condition here. But one that was dead already carries life, unlooked for life, for them. This is shortly

but strikingly marked here also. The power of reviving lay in the sepulchre of this mystic prophet.

And so with Jesus, the Messiah and Lord of His Israel. Things will be seen in Him according to this pattern; when it shall be said, "the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants; when He seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left, He shall say, See now that it is I, even I, and there is no God with me; I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal." Then, according to Ezekiel, the dry bones shall live; then the Lord will open the graves of His people and bring them out of their graves.

"At evening time it shall be light," we read. And again, "He turneth the shadow of death into the morning." Of these holy and august powers, we have faint touches in our prophet's history. For in the evening of his days, when he was a-dying, we saw a light shining, as in the case of Joash and the arrows, that was worthy of his life's meridian hour. And now, after his sun is gone down, even in the night of the tomb, the full power of the returning morning appears. And all has still a mystery in it. It is mystic ground as well as holy ground that we tread through these histories of our prophet, and in the spirit of our minds we must tread softly, as ever, with unshod feet, but still be in company with happy thoughts of Jesus and His ways.

Thus have we closed the history of "the great things that Elisha" the prophet did. Great things they surely were. We have, however, if I may so call it, a short

appendix to it, which I read as very characteristic and significant. I mean the notice taken in the last four verses of this chapter of the times of Jehoahaz and Joash. (See chap. xiii. 22—25.)

We are told that Hazael of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz; but that the Lord was gracious, and had respect to His people, remembering in their behalf His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And He gave Joash three victories over the son of Hazael, according to the sign of the arrows which, by command of Elisha, he had struck on the ground; and he took out of his hand the cities of Israel which his father had lost to Hazael in war.

Here we get the God of the fathers of Israel and His covenant of blessing, in company, too, with the mystic arrows of our prophet, strikingly owned. And this is, as I observed, very significant and characteristic. For Elisha's ways had been ways of grace and power towards Israel, shadowy or typical of the ways of Messiah in the behalf of His people. And now that those ways of our prophet had all been run, as we have seen, and even in death he had given life, and sent the prisoner from the pit, and made the buried ones to go up from their graves, in a little postscript we get this mention of Abraham's God and His covenant, by which Israel was to be secured and blest, in spite of all that was against them.

Is not this like the moral of the whole story? Is not this, as it were, the key to the mystery, or the sense of the parable? Do we not thus learn that the Lord has pledged, in all this history of Elisha, succour and strength and grace and revival to Israel in the latter day? It is

Israel delivered and blest, as of old, that we get here ; and nothing less. It is the ancient days of Israel's mercy in Egypt that are again before us. For there, when they groaned under the rod of Pharaoh, and sighed by reason of the bondage, God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, as He does here, and also, as He does here, had respect unto them. (Ex. ii. 23—25). Hazael may be as Pharaoh, but the God of Abraham is the God of Abraham still, and He can pledge deliverance and blessing by Elisha, as once He brought it by Moses.

It was long ere now that we heard of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in connection with the ten revolted tribes. Yea, did we ever before hear of Him as with them, save on the lips of our prophet's kinsman, as I may call him, Elijah? (See 1 Kings xviii. 36). But now Elisha has been the witness of His grace and power in the midst of them, and the God of grace, the God of the fathers, can now be owned over them and for them.

We have now gone through the actions of Elisha, whose name signifies, "salvation of God." It has given us many an expression of the marvellous power and abounding grace of Jesus—some faint, but true, traces of the Son of God, in that divine majesty of strength, and divine tenderness of goodness, which manifested Him in the days of His flesh.

All of Jesus, it is true, is not seen in him. Where

should we find that? As a suffering witness against the world, Elijah, as I have before said, the rather reflects Him. But in His ways of *power* and *grace* we see Him in Elisha.

There was no suffering for Elisha, I may say, after his master left him. It was not with him, as it had been with his master, the wrath of the throne prevailing to exile and harass him. But chief captains wait at his gates, and kings send presents to him. He discloses the secrets of one of them, disappoints the purposes of another, gives pledges of victory to a third, and grants supplies to the combined armies of them. Every path he treads wears after him some trace of the greatness of him who had been travelling there. Chariots of salvation fill the mountain, attending on the prophet. Famine, disease, and death own him. Nature again and again changes its course at his bidding. He goes onward in the Lord from strength to strength, and even his dead body puts forth strange and surprising virtue.

All this is seen in the ways of Elisha. *And yet all the while he was personally nothing in the world.* The more like Jesus. Elisha received bounty and care in the ordinary need of life from those, in whose behalf he was opening resources which were altogether beyond the reach or range of man's ability. How like was he made to Him, who though He himself was "an hungered," again and again fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. And though He sends the springs into the valleys that run among the hills, and measures the waters in the hollow of His hand, asked for a cup of cold water from a woman at a well; and took the

loan of an ass's colt from its owner, though the cattle on a thousand hills are His!

Remarkable it is, that in the dark realms of the kingdom of Israel, the place of the revolted tribes, the Lord should have raised up such prophets as Elisha and his master. Lights they truly were in dark places. Judah, which had still the sanctuary and the priesthood, was never so visited. A rich unction of the prophetic spirit was known in the waning hours of that kingdom, or after its sun was set, as in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others. And the same spirit had been there in earlier days, as in the person of Isaiah. But none of these were in the scene of action, working miracles, executing judgments as well as pronouncing them, ministering mercies as well as publishing them, as Elijah and Elisha were.

"A prophet mighty in deed and in word," is said of the Lord Jesus by one of his disciples. Elijah and Elisha were prophets mighty in *deed*. We have no book of either the prophet Elijah, or of the prophet Elisha, as we have of Isaiah. But there was no greatness about Isaiah, as there was about them; he was in no way important in the history of his day, as they were. In no sense was he a type of the Lord, though His prophet. But Jesus stands foreshadowed in them, in the most distinguishing features of His history. They tell of Him as the suffering witness who ends His course in heaven; and as the gracious, powerful, but self-emptying Friend of Israel, who went about dispensing the virtues of life and salvation through their cities and villages, and giving a pledge,

through His death, of their quickening in the last days.

These are "the great things" which cast a strong and bright light over the whole path of our prophet, every little spot in which bears the trace, as we have seen, of grace to Israel. And may our souls rejoice in the prospect of their final joy! that when the heavenly people have been removed to their heavenly places, the earth shall be the scene of the power and grace of the God of Elisha, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then, "praise ye the Lord from the heavens—praise the Lord from the earth," shall be the burthen and chorus of universal gladness. For in the dispensation of the fulness of times, God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him. And "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Blessed anticipation! Can we lay out ourselves and our talents upon it, beloved? Jeremiah, in faith of God's truth, spent his money on an expectation, though for the present it seemed to have been thrown away, for the Chaldeans were at the gates, and the fields of Anathoth were part of their plunder. (Jer. xxxii.)

Precious faith as well as brilliant prospect! And hope can celebrate it now, till "the nobler sweeter song" be heard in the presence of it.

"Joy to His ancient people!
 Your bonds He comes to sever,
 And now 'tis done,
 The Lord has won,
 And ye are free for ever!
 Joy to the ransom'd nations!
 The foe, the rav'ning lion
 Is bound in chains,
 While Jesus reigns
 King of the earth in Zion.

 Joy to the church triumphant!
 The Saviour's throne surrounding—
 They see His face,
 Adore His grace,
 O'er all their sin abounding.
 Crown'd with the mighty Victor,
 His royal glory sharing,
 Each fills a throne,
 His name alone,
 To heaven and earth declaring."

Our meditations began with Elijah, whose translation to heaven, after a life of suffering testimony on earth, tells us of that elect body, who, having continued with Jesus in His temptations, are to share His throne in the days of the kingdom; and as their representative, in company with Moses, we see him glorified on the distant heavenly hill. (Matt. xvii. 3). And now they have ended with Elisha, after a ministry of grace and power, quickening the dead estate of Israel, and bringing back the covenanted mercies of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to their seed in the land of their inheritance. As in a mystery, the tale of the heavens and the earth is told, and their divers glories are pledged. And the coming millennial days will verify this wondrous tale, and redeem these precious pledges.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

THE END.

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